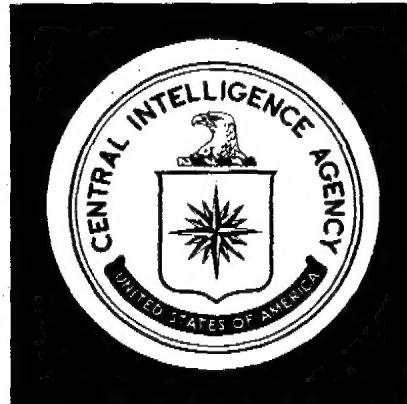


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# Memorandum

*Communist Intentions In The Current Campaign  
In South Vietnam*

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COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN  
IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

10 April 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN THE CURRENT  
CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Overview

The Vietnamese Communist Party's basic, overriding objective has not changed for more than four decades. Hanoi wants to gain political control over all of Vietnam, i.e., to conquer South Vietnam. The major campaign launched on 30 March is a virtually all-out effort to bring the Communists much closer to achieving that objective this year. In this campaign, the Communists appear ready to expend a large number of lives and great quantities of ordnance with little concern for the future, i.e., without much regard for husbanding resources that would be needed in the next dry season or the one after that.

Hanoi, in short, is playing this hand for the highest stakes. As outlined below, it is shoving most of its chips into this hand's pot. Such action is perforce a major gamble, no matter how strong Hanoi may consider its cards. If the North Vietnamese win this hand--i.e., if the current Communist campaign produces what comes to be considered in South Vietnam or the United States as a major Communist victory--Hanoi will have gone a long way toward recouping its losses of the past four years and a long way toward achieving its definition of winning the game.

Note: This paper was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinated with the Defense Intelligence Agency.

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This memorandum focuses on Communist near term tactical intentions in South Vietnam, assessing these intentions region by region. It therefore does not specifically address or discuss near term Communist intentions in Laos or Cambodia. South Vietnam is of course the main theater of combat and will clearly be the focus of Hanoi's major efforts in the weeks immediately ahead. In reading the paragraphs below, however, it should not be forgotten that Hanoi will use the residual forces it has in Laos and Cambodia to exert what pressure they can to support Communist efforts and further Hanoi's objectives in South Vietnam.

The conduct and net political outcome of Hanoi's current offensive campaign will be materially influenced by a subtle but profound change that has gradually come over the Indochina struggle over the past year or so. Hanoi, in a sense, is now in the politico-psychological position the allies were in during the second half of the nineteen sixties: It is now the Communists who stand to lose if they are not widely regarded as having won. This becomes even more the case now that Hanoi has launched what is so clearly an all-out effort, putting so many of its remaining chips unarguably and undisguisedly into this pot.

The current offensive is not a "do or die" effort in the sense that failure to win decisive victories would necessarily spell a quick end to Hanoi's struggle. Four decades of history give abundant witness to the Communist Party leadership's tenacity and dogged determination in the face of adversity. Should the current Communist offensive come to be widely deemed a failure in South Vietnam and the US, however, the stakes involved in its initiation are such that Hanoi's already existing problems would be compounded by orders of magnitude. This would probably not produce surrender and probably would not even produce early acceptance of negotiation on essentially US/GVN terms. But it would produce profound stresses within the top levels of the Vietnamese Communist leadership and,

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almost certainly, a basic re-examination of Hanoi's long term prospects and feasible strategies for their pursuit.

Given the stakes involved, Hanoi's current offensive effort will be as prolonged and intense as the Communists can make it. There will undoubtedly be peaks and valleys, sharp actions followed by respites or lulls. Overall, however, the current phase of struggle will last for many weeks and, with recycling, will probably be extended until mid-summer or even beyond. Its ultimate outcome is not inexorably foreordained at this writing and hence cannot be predicted with confidence or certainty. The long term results of Hanoi's current major gamble will be determined by what actually happens on the battlefields of South Vietnam and, equally, on how what is happening comes to be viewed and regarded by the people and governments of both South Vietnam and the United States.

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**PART I: HANOI'S CAMPAIGN STRATEGY**

**A. Headlines and Courage**

1. If Hanoi is to take over the South, it must reverse a number of unfavorable trends. The decline in popular support for the Communist cause and the decline in locally based Communist forces has become conspicuous during the last two years. One of the principal objectives of the current Communist campaign is to stop this decline in Communist vitality within South Vietnam. The main force assault on government forces and positions is meant to give new courage to all Communist cadre, fighters and commanders, and their sympathizers.

2. Moreover, Vietnamization had been proceeding in an orderly fashion inside South Vietnam, steadily eroding Communist strength and assets in populated areas. Partly (but not entirely) because Communist main forces have been fighting in Laos and Cambodia, the withdrawal of US forces from a direct ground combat role has gone smoothly, and South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) units and the territorial security forces and local militia have assumed the burden of protecting the country. Although they have moved with some caution in order to keep their own losses down, ARVN and the RF and PF have generally kept the initiative, and this has given them new confidence. Conversely, the confidence of the Communist side within South Vietnam has been undermined. At a minimum, the current Communist offensive is intended to reverse this trend, by destroying the new confidence of the government's military and paramilitary forces. Ideally, Hanoi wants to inflict shattering defeats against at least some major GVN forces or units.

3. The Communists have always considered it essential to destroy the cohesion of the anti-Communist government in Saigon. They now hope at the least that they will be able to inflict such punishment on the government's forces and so impressively challenge the government's control to some key populated areas

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that the GVN will lose its confidence and new dissension will arise among its ranks and within its leadership.

4. Hanoi has also been deeply concerned as it has seen world attention turn away from the Indochina war. Since it has counted heavily on the pressure of US public opinion to induce the US Government to withdraw its support from Saigon, it is particularly concerned that anti-war sentiment within the US no longer appears very vigorous or politically potent. Moreover, trends in South Vietnam have given some weight to allied claims in Paris that the Communists are not dealing from a position of strength in South Vietnam. The new enemy offensive is meant to reverse these trends as well, to incite new agitation by anti-war elements in the US and to backstop Communist negotiators in Paris.

**B. Options and Opportunities**

5. Given the decline in Communist local forces and the adverse trends on the diplomatic and political fronts, the main-force option is practically the only one remaining to Hanoi. Since the initial allied incursions into Cambodia two years ago, the Communists have been laying the groundwork for a return to heavy main-force action in South Vietnam. They have improved supply routes down through Laos and into Cambodia. They have developed a new system of base areas deeper in Cambodia. Last year, at heavy cost, they fought off a major ground threat to their essential Laotian routes. This year the Communists have dealt major blows to Cambodian and Laotian government forces, in an effort to secure their rear from attack as they adopt a more aggressive posture against South Vietnam's borders. The enemy's heavy, and effective use of artillery on the Plaine des Jarres provided a preview of their recent tactics against the line of South Vietnamese fire support bases on the southern edge of the DMZ. In a similar way, their strategy of inflicting heavy punishment on Cambodian forces in last December's action along Cambodian Route 6 may provide a preview of what the Communists hope to do to demoralize many South Vietnamese units.

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6. Because of the size of the stakes, because of the pressing need to reverse so many adverse trends, because the main-force option seems to be the only one that holds out any promise of success, and because this will work only if heavy damage is done to South Vietnamese defending forces, it seems clear that the Communists are intent on launching heavy assaults, even though these will inevitably entail severe Communist losses. Hanoi is probably willing to accept such losses because it also sees this as a year of special opportunities. US withdrawals have reduced the strength of all allied forces in South Vietnam to the point where the Communists feel much less concern for the safety of their supply routes and base areas in Laos and Cambodia. Moreover, this is an election year in the United States. For all these reasons, Hanoi regards this as the year to try to demonstrate its clout on the battlefield, to demonstrate to the US public and to the world at large that the Communists are far from a spent force in South Vietnam, and to make clear that there is no end in sight to the war unless the allies are prepared to offer Hanoi real hope of taking over control of the South, i.e., to bargain on what are essentially Hanoi's terms.

**C. The Campaign's Objective: A Watershed Military Victory**

7. The Communists clearly hope their efforts will produce what comes to be regarded as an over-all net victory, so impressive that it will lead to a whole series of new trends. At best, they hope to unravel the fighting forces of South Vietnam, to sow such dissension in the government establishment that it begins to come apart at the seams, and to mortally weaken US support for the anti-Communist effort in Indochina, thus paving the way for a direct take-over of the South. This may have been what Pham Van Dong was talking about months ago when he told more than one diplomatic contact that he expected to see fundamental changes in Vietnam by mid-1972. This is the message, reminiscent of Tet 1968, that is now being passed to Communist soldiers; they are being told that this is to be the "last battle of the war."

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8. At a minimum, the Communists hope to get some fundamental if less spectacular returns on their investment basically reversing currently adverse trends. They hope to take the initiative and make the government's military forces more self-protective, cautious, and defensive-minded, vacating much of rural South Vietnam in order to defend urban centers and other vital areas. Conversely, Hanoi hopes to give new courage and new freedom of movement to Viet Cong local forces. Even if the main-force campaign fails to achieve Hanoi's objectives, if it goes at all well the Communists will be looking for a shift in psychology and in local balances of power favorable to their side. If the Communists again appear to many South Vietnamese to be the invincible wave of the future, if their local assets can be rebuilt and move about with greater freedom, and if they can again draw support from the local populace, they will probably believe they have achieved a considerable victory.

D. The Costs and the Risks

9. The Communists are prepared to accept heavy personnel losses to their main forces this year, partly because these losses can be replaced-- albeit at considerable cost and with a further decline in troop quality--by drawing on the manpower pool available within North Vietnam. It is less clear, however, that they are willing to suffer heavy losses among what remains of their local force structure within South Vietnam. If their campaign falls far short of its goals, as their offensives in 1968 did, it would be even harder this time to find replacements among southerners for these losses. Decisions on how to employ remaining local forces will therefore probably be made only after the Communists get a clearer picture of the likely outcome of the main-force campaign.

10. The Communists are also prepared to accept political and propaganda setbacks as a result of their use of more conventional invasion tactics. They are

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prepared to accept any stresses or strains the current offensive may possibly produce in Hanoi's relations with Moscow or Peking (though here we caution that the question of Moscow and Peking's positions with respect to this offensive is a complex subject beyond the scope of this paper.) Furthermore, Hanoi's air defense preparations throughout North Vietnam indicate that the Communists have also anticipated and are prepared to accept a limited resumption of the bombing of southern North Vietnam. Indeed, they may feel the costs of such bombing may be at least partially offset by political or propaganda gains abroad.

11. What Hanoi has to fear more than these concrete costs is the political cost of having to settle on the battlefield for something that looks like a failure, or even a result that cannot be plausibly touted as a net success. If Communist forces eventually must pull back from Quang Tri city and Hue without capturing either, and if they suffer very heavy losses in the sieges, it would be widely interpreted in South Vietnam as a success for the defending forces and failure for the Communist side. If this happens, if the Communists have not at least broken government control over some important centers, if they have not driven local security forces back to the towns and out of much of the countryside, and most important, if their actions have not resulted in some significant political breakthrough in South Vietnam, it will be considered a serious reverse for their side. Given the trends that have characterized the situation up to today, Hanoi must be regarded as having won its watershed victory or it will performe suffer a major and damaging psychological defeat with profound political ramifications.

12. A clear defeat at the hands of South Vietnam's defending forces might well produce an agonizing reappraisal in Hanoi. There have been many signs of disagreement on priorities and strategies in North Vietnam for much of the past year, and a clear defeat of the army now invading South

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Vietnam would call many recent decisions into question. A less clear defeat or even an ambiguous net result would also produce considerable anguish in North Vietnam, but the North Vietnamese would retain the capability and probably the will to return to the battle another year.

**E. High Stakes and High Strategy**

13. With the local force war going badly against them, the Communists have for the first time turned to a relatively straightforward, conventional invasion. Never before have the Communists relied so heavily on invading divisions and so lightly on in-country local forces. The new premium they are putting on heavy artillery, tanks, and heavy anti-aircraft weaponry indicate that this time they do not mean to fade away quickly if the battle appears to be going against them. This time they are much more likely to fight for control of the lines of communication that are needed to move their weaponry and supplies, and also to fight for territory and position, particularly at the northern end of South Vietnam.

14. It seems highly likely that the Communists hope to sustain heavy pressure simultaneously on several fronts for as long as possible. Hanoi hopes that with most of the US force gone, the South Vietnamese will feel themselves spread thin and in danger of being whipsawed, as they were in 1965. Over a three-day period last week, the South Vietnamese decided in rapid succession to send the 9th ARVN Division from the delta to the northern end of the country, to send the 21st ARVN Division north instead of the 9th, and finally to send the 21st to northern Military Region 3 rather than MR-1. This series of decisions demonstrated graphically how difficult it may be for the South Vietnamese to reinforce several major theaters if they are threatened simultaneously. Similarly, the Communists doubtless are also hoping to confront the allied side with difficult choices in allocating its air resources. The rapidity of the allied buildup of air and naval power, however, may have already exceeded Communist expectations.

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15. The Communists have already compounded the reinforcement problems on the government side, merely by maintaining a credible threat against Hue, Kontum, and the area north of Saigon, while mounting an actual heavy assault against Quang Tri Province. The mere presence of strong enemy forces has been enough to make it dangerous to send units from Hue to Quang Tri city, or from Saigon to Kontum. It seems unlikely that the Communists plan to expend their supply stockpiles or their manpower resources quickly. Instead, they are more likely to keep the pressure on in each of South Vietnam's military regions at least for at least the next several weeks.

16. As will be discussed in greater detail in the region by region discussion that follows, it appears likely that the Communists would ideally want to seize and hold virtually all of Thua Thien and Quang Tri provinces, including the cities of Hue and Quang Tri. They very probably also hope to seize and hold Kontum city and much of the surrounding highlands. They often speak and think in terms of maximum objectives, but they are realists, and they probably recognize that in the final event they may achieve a good deal less than this.

17. The Communists undoubtedly expect that even if they fail to seize and hold Hue or wide stretches of the highlands, their attacks in the attempt will be devastating for South Vietnamese morale. If they can get into some major cities, the Communists can make expelling their forces a very costly proposition--costly both to the allied forces fighting them and to the cities themselves.

18. The extent to which the Communists can seize and how long they can hold key centers or stretches of territory will depend, of course, on how the battles go. As the course of the battle becomes clearer, the Communist High Command will decide how to proceed: whether to commit available local forces in particular areas; whether to have

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the Provisional Revolutionary Government run up the flag and claim to govern certain areas for a period or indefinitely; or whether to take new initiatives in the propaganda and diplomatic fields.\*

*\*For example, a quick call for cease-fire if significant tactical successes are achieved.*

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**PART II: BATTLE PLANS BY REGION**

19. The Communists have always been able to bring their greatest strength to bear on the northern end of South Vietnam for the simple reason that this area is closest to North Vietnam. In general, the farther south one goes in South Vietnam, the less serious is the threat from the North. Quang Tri presently is most seriously threatened, Hue is next, and Kontum third. Although the enemy has assembled a powerful force north of Saigon, the supply routes there are long and the defending forces relatively strong. At the southern end of the country, the enemy can cause considerable disruption, but, his capabilities in Military Region IV are weaker than elsewhere.

**A. The Northern Part of South Vietnam**

20. The terrain of northern South Vietnam gives the North Vietnamese Army both advantages and disadvantages in its current campaign in the coastal lowlands. Just south of Hue, a spur of mountains extends to the sea. Thus, while the terrain is fairly flat from the DMZ into Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces, land routes must wind through some rugged hills to connect those provinces with the rest of South Vietnam. In terms of terrain alone then, these two provinces may be more accessible from the North than from the South.

21. On the other hand, these same mountains will soon shield the Quang Tri and Thua Thien coasts from the Southwest Monsoon rains, and although flying weather will get progressively worse by late May and early June through much of the rest of South Vietnam, the weather will improve along this particular short stretch of coast. In sum, the weather cuts both ways. At the same time that it may be easier to reinforce and resupply this area from the north, it will also be easier for the allied side to bring its expanded air power to bear.

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22. The Communists are probably prepared to undergo prolonged assaults from the air if they can secure control of this coast. Their initial assaults into Quang Tri Province and their subsequent deployments lend some substance to their bold words about trying to make this a "last battle." The ferocity of the first artillery and ground assaults were clearly a shock to the green and untried elements of the recently formed 3rd ARVN Division. It appears that it was primarily the sheer volume and accuracy of the artillery fire, rather than ground force pressure that caused friendly forces to withdraw from most of the fire support bases along the southern edge of the DMZ.

23. Since their initial assaults, the North Vietnamese have been compelled to regroup, and bring up equipment. They have been maneuvering the equivalent of over two divisions toward the South Vietnamese defensive positions along the Cua Viet River. These forces include the 308th NVA Division and the regiments controlled by the Communists' B-5/70 Front. Trucks, heavy field guns, anti-aircraft artillery, and possibly even surface-to-air missiles have been detected converging on the government's new lines. The presence of these heavy weapons in the enemy's arsenal seems to imply that they will try to stay and hold their ground for an extended period rather than attack for two or three weeks and then move off to safer terrain as they have often done in the past. They have, however, been taking considerable equipment losses, particularly a large number of tanks.

24. At the same time this force of over two divisions has been moving toward Quang Tri city from the north, a third division, the 304th, has been moving from west to east toward Quang Tri city. It would appear that the enemy intends to send all three divisions against Quang Tri city's defenses. The latter includes the one regiment of the 3rd ARVN Division that is still considered combat effective, and South Vietnamese Marine and Ranger battalions recently sent as reinforcements from the south. These forces are getting better air

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support than could be made available during the initial assaults on the northern tier of fire support bases when the weather was bad, but the Communists will doubtless try to concentrate their attacks during the intervals of cloudy weather that are likely to occur this month.

25. The Communists probably cannot muster as much heavy firepower for the next attacks as they did during their initial assaults from across the DMZ. For one thing, allied air attacks and their extension above the DMZ are making it increasingly difficult for the Communists to bring their heavier equipment south. Thus the Communists will probably have to rely more heavily this time on powerful infantry assaults, protected from air attack, if possible, by cloudy weather and by the anti-aircraft weapons they have brought with them. Given the size of the enemy forces the enemy can bring to bear, repelling them will not be easy.

26. To the south of the Quang Tri theater, the Communists' 324B Division has been edging east out of the mountains to threaten Hue, much as the 304th is putting pressure on Quang Tri. At the moment, however, the 324B is the only major force threatening Hue. It is possible that it will mount strong attacks against the defending 1st ARVN Division, the best South Vietnam has to offer, but it seems more likely that for the time being it will basically continue to put on enough pressure to make the threat credible, tying down the 1st ARVN Division while the action proceeds to the north around Quang Tri. The 324B's pressure will include heavy probing, however, and if tactical opportunities develop the Communists would certainly want to exploit them to launch an attack on Hue simultaneously with their renewed pressure against Quang Tri.

27. If the two divisions bearing on Quang Tri city from the north and the one division moving in from the west can seize and occupy that center and destroy or scatter the defenders, then two of the three divisions are likely to continue south to

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repeat the same general scheme of attack against Hue in cooperation with the 324B. If the threats to the south against Kontum and north of Saigon sufficiently impede South Vietnamese reinforcement of Hue, and if the Communists manage to seize Quang Tri, they may be able to develop enough momentum to seize Hue, mainly on the strength of their infantry. This would be such a major setback for the South, involving as it would the defeat of the government's most respected division, that it would be well worth a great cost in lives to the North Vietnamese. Whether or not the Communists proved able to hold this territory indefinitely, they could make it extremely costly for the allied side to drive them out again. Under such a scenario, civilian losses in Hue and Quang Tri cities would be particularly severe.

28. This is what the Communists probably hope to do if all goes well for their side. But their initial impact on the still-new 3rd ARVN Division should not be taken as a clear indication of how they will fare in future battles. The Communists are now up against better quality troops in the Rangers and 1st ARVN Division, and the South Vietnamese have always fought more effectively when they have been defending their homes and families. Moreover, allied air power has now begun to inflict a heavier toll. Even if the Communists fail to achieve their maximum objectives, they are probably willing to continue to take substantial losses from government counterattacks on the ground and from allied air attacks, in order to throw a real fright into the population of the cities and their defenders.

29. If the Communists can put enough pressure on Hue and Quang Tri city, and if they can do enough damage to the government side farther south, they may then decide to use some of their remaining local forces. It is unlikely, however, that they will accept very heavy local force losses unless they think they can seize the area, since it would otherwise be almost impossible to rebuild their local apparatus.

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**B. The Highlands**

30. The enemy has built the largest force it has ever deployed in the highlands, over 40,000 men. Although this force is impressive by virtue of its size, it does not include high quality troops comparable to those of the 304th, the 308th, the 324B, and the B-5/70 Front to the north. In fact, the quality of this force is highly uncertain, particularly that of the 320th Division, which is the main new addition to the enemy's highlands deployments this year. The 320th has been taking casualties since it started through Laos and does not seem as competent as some of the others. This division has a history of taking substantial casualties in battles where the military return was slight and of breaking contact when the going got rough.

31. So far, this force has not accomplished much. It has been in the area for about two months, and has been hit from the air by pre-emptive B-52 raids and on the ground by ARVN spoiling probes and it may have been severely disrupted. Much of this force has been edging toward Kontum city. It clearly should have launched a powerful attack against the city timed to precede the attacks across the DMZ and add to the psychological impact of the assaults across the DMZ. The bulk of the force still seems to be holding its fire and it clearly has problems of some sort. Some elements have put pressure on a few fire support bases on "Rocket Ridge," north of Kontum city, but without success and with heavy losses. Nothing has yet been heard from the heavy enemy guns known to be in the area.

32. Whatever the enemy's difficulties may be, it is clear that he intends to do a lot more with this sizable force than he has so far. Enemy documents say that the Communists want to capture Kontum city, Pleiku city, and much of the surrounding territory. They want to overwhelm the not-very-highly-respected ARVN forces there and seize Route 14 and Route 19. The enemy would then like to push east to the sea, destroying the government's control over

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Binh Dinh Province, the most populous in the country. Even if the Communists cannot impose their own control over this stretch of coast, if they could severely damage the government's control they would have cut the country in two, an objective of the Communists since the early 1960s.

33. If the force now assembled in the Kontum area could merely push into western Binh Dinh, it could expect some help from the Communist 3rd Division that operates in northern Binh Dinh and southern Quang Ngai provinces. This is the area where the Communists' local roots are three decades deep and they still enjoy considerable popular sympathy. The Communists might be willing to expose their local forces to government counterfire here if they thought this would help swing the balance in their favor.

34. If the enemy achieves his maximum objectives in the highlands, and if he manages at the same time to overrun Hue, he would then be able to call on the strong local support still available in Quang Nam Province and in Quang Ngai Province and put heavy pressure on Da Nang. Control over the whole northern half of the country would then be within his grasp. This is probably the enemy's ideal scenario for northern South Vietnam.

35. The Communists' opportunistic use of bad flying weather to protect their advancing troops in Quang Tri Province, however, also suggests the possibility that the highlands force may be waiting until the weeks just before the onset of the Southwest Monsoon, which could begin in late May or early June. Logistics problems would mount during the rainy season and it would be difficult to deploy large units, but the strong assaults might be timed for shortly before the rains, particularly if the Communists hope to capitalize on their heavy weapons. If the Communists could capture Kontum city and the surrounding district towns, it would be extremely difficult for the government side to bring air power to bear in any effort to dig them out without destroying the cities and towns. It would also be

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difficult to send in a large relief force overland to the highlands. It therefore seems entirely possible that by timing his attacks carefully with the weather, the enemy still hopes to make his word good, seize large portions of the highlands, and hold them for months to come.

36. But just as the Communists may well be stopped in their tracks before they get into Hue, their unimpressive showing so far in the highlands suggests that they should have a hard time taking Kontum city, let alone holding it or pushing east to the sea.

37. The Communist local force may be able to mount some troublesome harassing actions in the south of Military Region 2 in such centers as Dalat and Ban Me Thuot, but the enemy is not believed to have effective concentrations in these areas, and the challenge to government control there is likely to be limited. The same also holds true for much of eastern Military Region 3, where the enemy is relatively weak both locally and in terms of main force strength.

#### C. The Saigon Area

38. Along the Cambodian border north of Saigon the enemy has assembled three first-line divisions, the 5th, 7th, and 9th, and during the last week he has sent regiments from each of them into northern Military Region 3. Moving down Route 13 through Binh Long Province, the enemy has already captured a district town, some fire support bases, and an airfield. The threat to Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces, both sparsely populated and not very heavily defended, is high. These provinces by their nature, however, are not very lucrative targets for the North Vietnamese.

39. Politically more important Tay Ninh Province, home of the Cao Dai sect, and the provinces closer to Saigon, on the other hand, are relatively well defended. The South Vietnamese 25th, 18th, and

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5th divisions are now being reinforced by the 21st Division from the delta, and the Regional and Popular Forces man many defensive positions between the Cambodian border and the urban centers in Tay Ninh and farther south. Any Communist drive in force toward Tay Ninh city and points south would be extremely vulnerable to air attack until the monsoon rains come, and thereafter large scale deployments will be difficult. If the Communists do manage to take some important centers in Military Region 3, the government almost certainly has enough forces nearby to push them back out and certainly enough to limit their progress toward Saigon.

40. Because the government enjoys a more favorable local balance of forces than in the threatened areas to the north, the prospects for keeping the Communists at bay seem relatively good. The enemy nevertheless clearly intends at the least to maintain a credible threat, partly to prevent the government from freely sending reinforcements farther north. The move of the 21st Division from the delta to MR-3 rather than farther north suggests that he may be having some success. To make his threat seem more menacing, the enemy probably intends to attempt to send elements of the 5th, 7th, and 9th divisions fairly deeply into Tay Ninh Province, and he may well attempt to seize and hold parts of Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces. He probably also will ask his more modest forces which operate in the provinces surrounding Saigon to conduct harassing actions.

41. If government forces should be severely discouraged by news of possible Communist successes to the north, and if there were signs of growing dissensions within the government, the enemy might well revise his thinking and, accepting heavy losses, try to drive hard against the government's superior forces in the capital area. This involves a whole series of "ifs," however, and at present the enemy's intentions in Military Region 3 appear to be limited to developing a credible main-force threat to the northern three provinces of the region and mounting some harassing actions closer to Saigon.

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The Delta

42. As usual, the delta is receiving the lowest priority from the Communists as a theater of main-force operations. So far, the enemy is sending four regiments and a division-level headquarters (the 1st NVA, now called the "Phuoc Long Front") from its forces in Cambodia to help raise the threat level in Military Region 4. Clearly Hanoi intends to rely primarily on the few forces it already has in the region to do their best to tie down the government forces there and prevent their being used as reinforcements farther north.

43. On the other hand, the departure of the 21st ARVN Division for MR-3 and the arrival of four enemy regiments in or near the delta will improve the enemy's force position in MR-4. With the 7th and 9th ARVN divisions stretched thin, the Communists probably hope that the three understrength Communist regiments that have been operating out of the U Minh Forest and the four other regiments scattered across the delta will be in a better position to try to overrun some major government military positions and district towns. They are certain to ask them to try.

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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET/SPOKE

April 11, 1972  
URGENT INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Phil Odeen  
SUBJECT: CIA Study on NVN Capabilities

CIA has prepared at your request an assessment of NVN's manpower and logistics capabilities to conduct military operations over the next three months. The summary judgement of CIA is that:

"...the Vietnamese Communists have the overall manpower and logistic capabilities necessary to sustain their offensive activities for the next three months -- that is, to sustain major main force activity in Military Regions (MRs) 1 and 2, heavy main force probes in MR 3, and moderate harassment, principally by fire, in MR 4. This judgement performance ignores several critical variables -- for example, the impact of Allied counteroffensive operations or unusually heavy enemy supply or manpower losses as a result of Allied air activity (which are not postulated).

Manpower

NVN combat forces now in place are fully adequate to continue fighting at current or expanded levels for the next three months. However, the heavy losses the NVN has suffered in recent years have reduced the quality of NVN soldiers - cadre and troops.

Over 120,000 troops have been infiltrated south thus far this dry season, surpassing total infiltration of any year except 1968 when half the 250,000 infiltrated moved south in April-August after the intense fighting commenced. An additional 28,000 troops deployed into SVN in organized units from NVN, Laos, and Cambodia. The infiltration has primarily been for the forces in MR 1 and 2. The rather limited infiltration toward the areas farther south places limits on the intensity and duration of NVA combat in MRs 3 and especially 4.

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Including forces in Cambodia and just above the DMZ (but excluding the 325th) the NVA is estimated to have about 150,000 combat and administrative service troops now targetted on Vietnam compared with about 170,000 in 1968. VC forces are of course smaller than in 1968. The assessment does not consider how many men may be added over the next few months, but it says that conscription has been high in NVN during the past year particularly in December and January. These men will be ready to move south in May. Although the weather in South Laos will deteriorate then, we must recall that 130,000 troops infiltrated to SVN between April and August 1968. Also, movement across the DMZ would avoid the rainy season problems.

As a result of this infiltration, enemy combat strength in SVN and border areas has increased over last year by about 27,000. The other 93,000 were used to replace losses, to provide support and as a pool for later replacement of losses. The enemy OB was further increased by the movement of an estimated 28,000 troops across the DMZ and from Laos and Cambodia.

Enemy OB (000)

	<u>Dec 1969</u>	<u>Dec 1970</u>	<u>Dec 1971</u>	<u>Apr 1972</u>
<u>VC/NVA</u>				
SVN	130-150	85-95	80-90	115-130
Cambodia	-	20-25	25-30	30-35
<u>Khmer Comm</u>	-	10-20	15-30	15-30
<u>PL/NVA</u>				
No Laos	35-40	30-35	40-45	40-45
So Laos	20-25	30-35	30-40	25-35

CIA does not include some 35,000 - 45,000 of the infiltration personnel who are considered to be "a stock of fillers to offset combat casualties" in the OB figures, nor in computation of force ratios. Thus the enemy has already provided replacements for casualties on the order of one-third of his OB. Use of these fillers and additional infiltration and movement across the DMZ would retain his combat strength in the face of what we would consider devastating losses. Of course quality and morale would fall even if numerical OB does not.

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Combat Capability

As a result of increased enemy strength and U. S. withdrawals (and failure of ARVN to get its combat units up to full strength), the main force ratio has shown a significant decrease in all areas of SVN. The ratio is about 2-1 in MR 1 and 2 and near parity in the most directly threatened areas. The GVN has a more favorable force ratio in MR 3 (3.3-1) and 4 (4.6-1).

A major factor in NVA capabilities is the losses they are suffering from prevention attacks, bombing, etc. The extent is unclear, but CIA doubts if they have been as heavy as in past major campaigns given the bad weather which restricts friendly air. By drawing on the filler pool the enemy can retain his OB in the face of substantial losses.

Logistics

The enemy has made a major resupply effort this year and is in better logistic shape than he was a year ago. The supply flow has been especially heavy across the DMZ and thru Laos into the MRs 1 and 2.

Supply movements into Southern Laos and Cambodia have also been high this year, probably at record levels. Thus the enemy's supply situation is probably the best in years (since losing the Sihanoukville port). The supply movements seems to emphasize arms and ammunition, perhaps reflecting the adequacy of food from Cambodia. Thus the NVA apparently has the needed stock close to the SVN border to wage a major effort in the South. However, CIA does not believe supplies are adequate for major combat in both MRs 3 and 4. A much more serious problem for the NVA is the distribution of supplies to its forces within SVN, but the assessment gives little attention to this problem which is the primary restraint in MR 4 and the coastal areas of MRs 2 and 3.

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SENSITIVE



# Memorandum

*North Vietnam's Manpower and Logistics Capabilities  
for Carrying Out Offensive Military Operations in  
South Vietnam During the Next Three Months*

MORI PAGES 28-54 PER C02706864

DIA & NSA DECLASSIFICATION/RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

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*Handle via Comint Channels*

SC-07039/72  
10 April 1972

*#14*

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**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**  
10 April 1972

**INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM**

**NORTH VIETNAM'S MANPOWER AND LOGISTICS CAPABILITIES  
FOR CARRYING OUT OFFENSIVE MILITARY OPERATIONS  
IN SOUTH VIETNAM DURING THE NEXT THREE MONTHS**

**Introduction**

1. This memorandum addresses the question of North Vietnam's capabilities to continue the present Communist offensive in South Vietnam during the next three months at current or accelerated levels. The discussion concerns enemy capabilities as judged from historical experience and from current signs of logistical and manpower readiness. It does not take explicit account - in a quantitative way - of the possible impact on enemy behavior of successfully parrying his offensive efforts by Allied military actions or disrupting his supply system by a greatly accelerated bombing interdiction effort. Such factors obviously bear on this analysis, and have clearly been operative in previous Communist main force actions.

2. The overall capabilities question is approached by examining manpower, logistics, North Vietnam's general manpower reserves, infiltration and the disposition of enemy forces, the magnitude of Hanoi's commitment to current operations, and current Communist capabilities and by making a brief comparison of enemy and friendly force ratios. After a general look, these matters are assessed with specific reference to each of South Vietnam's four military regions.

3. Our net judgment is that the Vietnamese Communists have the overall manpower and logistic capabilities necessary to sustain their offensive activities for the next three months - that is, to sustain major main force activity in Military Regions (MRs) 1 and 2, heavy main force probes in MR 3, and moderate harassment, principally by fire, in MR 4. As indicated above, this judgment perforce ignores several critical variables -- for

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Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency in coordination with the Defense Intelligence Agency.

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example, the impact of Allied counteroffensive operations or unusually heavy enemy supply or manpower losses as a result of Allied air activity (which are not postulated). It presupposes other variables, such as a pattern of combat generally similar to that seen since 30 March, a pattern incorporating lulls and respites even in periods of overall heavy pressure. Finally, it is stressed that this memorandum deals with logistic and manpower **capabilities** for a relatively brief time span (three months). It does not address intentions or the possible political or psychological impact on friendly or enemy forces of the outcome of key single engagements or campaigns. Communist intentions are addressed in a separate, complementary paper.

ConclusionsManpower

4. The combat forces North Vietnam now has in place are adequate to prosecute the war during the next three months at current or even slightly higher levels of intensity, provided Communist loss levels do not rise precipitously in the next few weeks. In MR 1 the enemy can continue heavy fighting for about the next three months - given his short lines of communication and enhanced firepower capability and the fact that the weather is likely to remain good until September. The enemy's capability is similar in MR 2, but by mid-May weather will become an increasingly important factor. The intensity of fighting in the B-3 Front area will undoubtedly be stepped up in the next few weeks, and on a manpower basis alone it could be broadened to other areas of MR 2 over the next two-three months. In MR 3 the enemy has the capability to increase significantly the pressure against ARVN forces, especially in the border provinces; and if the combat forces now along the border are committed to combat, the enemy could expand deeper into MR 3, although expecting to meet stiff and preponderant Allied resistance. The enemy's main force capability in MR 4 is considerably less than in the other military regions, and the best he can hope for probably is to tie down the GVN forces there in a standoff defensive situation, although the Communists can raise the level of harassment and terrorism.

Logistics

5. From a logistics standpoint, the North Vietnamese are in a much better position now than they were a year ago. A heavy flow of supplies this dry season has resulted in a buildup of stocks, particularly in or near the northern half of South Vietnam. In MR 1 the Communists probably

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have sufficient supplies nearby to sustain the present offensive for three or more months. Continuing resupply during the remainder of the dry season can be used to replenish stocks as they are consumed or destroyed. In MR 2, heavy supply movements have accompanied the unprecedented buildup of enemy troops in the B-3 Front area. The enemy can undoubtedly launch a major offensive now and should be able to maintain a sufficient flow of supplies to continue an offensive for several months. In MR 3 the enemy probably has sufficient supplies on hand to sustain major engagements in the border provinces and - depending on Allied resistance - could gradually extend the scope of such operations to other areas of MR 3. Logistics will continue to be a limiting factor in the region as a whole, however. In MR 4, enemy forces probably can logistically support several combat high points such as are now occurring as well as a more extensive use of indirect fire attacks. But it is highly unlikely that the enemy could sustain a major offensive in MR 4 over the next three months unless he has some unusual success in landing supplies across the beaches.

#### Discussion

##### North Vietnam's Manpower Reserves

6. Hanoi has sufficient overall manpower reserves to continue the Indochina war at current levels of intensity during the next three months. It has a manpower pool of an estimated 1.3 million male civilians aged 15-39 who are fit for military service, approximately one-half million of whom are in the 17-25 age bracket. North Vietnam can induct and train up to 100,000 men per year without drawing down this reserve. While raw manpower reserves thus pose no constraint to Hanoi during the next three months, the high and persistent loss levels suffered by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) have caused deterioration in the quality of North Vietnamese soldiers -- both cadres and troops -- during the past several years. North Vietnamese commanders in the field are faced with the problem of operating on unfamiliar territory with greener troops and less experienced cadres than in the past. There is no shortage of raw recruits, but it is doubtful that experienced officers and NCO's are available in sufficient numbers for North Vietnam to expand its present force structure in the next several months.

7. Conscription in North Vietnam appears to have been high over the past year,<sup>(1)</sup> and there are several good indications that a major callup occurred during December 1971 and early January 1972. While this callup

1. Estimated at about 150,000 men.

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immediately affects only North Vietnam's training base - there is a three to four month timespan between induction and availability for assignment - these troops could be intended as replacements for future combat losses.

Infiltration and Disposition of Forces

8. Hanoi appears to have made the maximum feasible commitment to the war in South Vietnam this dry season - from the point of view of infiltration and unit deployment. Thus far, Hanoi has dispatched about 120,000 infiltrators to the southern war zones. This compares with some 106,200 during the entire dry season last year (1970/71). The number of new infiltration starts has been low in recent weeks, but the current large-scale military action in South Vietnam may portend a resumption of the infiltration flow toward the end of the current dry season - perhaps even extending into the early part of the rainy season.

9. Dry-season infiltration starts during 1970/71 and 1971/72, by destination, are as follows:

	<u>1970/71</u> <u>(Sep-Jun)</u>	<u>1971/72</u> <u>(Sep-early Apr)</u>
GVN MRs 1 and 2		
Tri-Thien-Hue	6,000	12,000
MR 5	14,200	16,000
B-3 Front	14,500	42,000
GVN MRs 3 and 4 and Cambodia		
COSVN	45,000	36,000
Southern Laos	26,500 a/	14,000
Total	106,200	120,000

*a. Including some units deployed for Lam Son 719.*

10. Clearly the most significant increments to total infiltration are the 42,000 currently estimated for the B-3 Front (this figure includes the NVA 320th Division), and the 12,000 in the Tri-Thien-Hue (TTH) area

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(which includes the 324B Division). The following tabulation shows the estimated current infiltration flow, by order of battle (OB) area, and indicates that on the order of 80,000 of the 120,000 infiltrators were headed for South Vietnam, compared with 40,000 for southern Laos and Cambodia.

Destination	Strength	OB Area		Strength	Thousands
		OB Area	Strength		
Tri-Thien-Hue Region	12	MR 1	20		
MR 5	16				
B-3 Front	42	MR 2	50		
COSVN	36	MR 3 MR 4 Cambodia	5 5 26	a/ a/ a/	
Southern Laos	14	Southern Laos	14		
<i>Total</i>	120		120		

a. This breakdown is a rough illustrative estimate.

11. We estimate that this year's infiltration has provided for an expansion of the NVA combat OB in South Vietnam and Cambodia by about 27,000 men, increasing the combat OB about 22,000 in South Vietnam and providing for a 5,000-man increase to COSVN's concentration of combat forces in Cambodia opposite GVN MR 3. The remaining 93,000 infiltrators have been used to expand the rear services system in southern Laos and Cambodia and provide a stock of fillers to offset combat casualties.

12. A further expansion of the enemy OB in South Vietnam occurred in late March and early April, when 28,000 more combat troops deployed into the country in organic units from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>(2)</sup> This increase, together with the 22,000 increment owing to infiltration, raises the enemy's South Vietnam combat OB to about 120,000 men, as shown in the following tabulation:

2. These forces include the 304th and 308th Divisions from North Vietnam, elements of the 2nd Division from southern Laos, and three regiments from Cambodia.

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	Dec 1969	Dec 1970	Dec 1971	Apr 1972
VC/NVA	<u>130-150</u>	<u>105-120</u>	<u>105-120</u>	<u>145-165</u>
South Vietnam a/ Cambodia	130-150 --	85-95 20-25	80-90 25-30	115-130 30-35
Khmer Communists	<u>N.A.</u>	<u>10-20</u>	<u>15-30</u>	<u>15-30</u>
Pathet Lao/ NVA b/	<u>55-65</u>	<u>60-70</u>	<u>70-85</u>	<u>65-80</u>
Northern Laos	35-40	30-35	40-45	40-45
Southern Laos	20-25	30-35	30-40	25-35

a. Figures for South Vietnam include those NVA forces located in southern North Vietnam between Dong Hoi and the DMZ which are considered to be a threat to South Vietnam. These forces numbered 13,000 in December 1969, 10,000 in December 1970, 12,000 in December 1971, and 20,000 in late March 1972. The latter 20,000 troops deployed to the GVN along with 8,000 additional combat troops from Cambodia and Laos between late March and early April. The figure for South Vietnam for 1969 includes some forces actually stationed in Cambodia but targeted against South Vietnam.

b. Including troops in air defense units.

#### The Magnitude of Hanoi's Commitment

13. The manpower indicators demonstrate the magnitude of North Vietnam's current manpower commitment for the war in South Vietnam. As a result of dry season infiltration, unit redeployments, and an earlier expansion of the force structure in Laos, Hanoi now has reduced the number of infantry divisions available within North Vietnam for home defense or deployment elsewhere in Indochina to the lowest level of the war (including early 1971 when Hanoi deployed four divisions to counter Operation Lam Son 719). The tabulation below depicts these division dispositions.

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On a regimental basis, the some 15 regular infantry regiments<sup>(3)</sup> currently remaining in North Vietnam (including both independent regiments and those subordinate to divisions) reflect an even greater drawdown in North Vietnam's mobile reserve than Hanoi's previous low point in the Tet 1968 period.

<u>Division</u>	<u>March 1968</u>		<u>April 1972</u>	
	<u>North Vietnam</u>	<u>Out-of-Country</u>	<u>North Vietnam</u>	<u>Out-of-Country</u>
304th		South Vietnam		South Vietnam
308th	X			South Vietnam
312th	X			Laos
316th		Laos		Laos
320th		South Vietnam		South Vietnam
324B		South Vietnam		South Vietnam
325th		South Vietnam	X	
330th	X		X	
350th	X		X	
<i>Total</i>	4	5	3	6

14. A final measure of North Vietnam's commitment to the war in South Vietnam this dry season is obtained by examining the number of NVA combat and administrative services troops deployed out of country since 1968, as shown in the tabulation below. Although the overall number of forces out of country is greater than it was in 1968, because of increased requirements in Cambodia and Laos, the number in South Vietnam is less than in 1968.

3. Including six regiments subordinate to the 330th and 350th Infantry Divisions. These two divisions have, for the past several years, been heavily involved in training recruits as well as in their normal home defense role.

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	Thousands				
	Dec 1968	Dec 1969	Dec 1970	Dec 1971	Apr 1972
Total a/	215	210	195	210	250
South Vietnam b/	170	145	75	80	120
Cambodia	--	--	35	30	35
Laos c/	45	65	85	100	95

a. Including combat and administrative service personnel.

b. Including those NVA forces located in North Vietnam between Dong Hoi and the DMZ considered a threat to the GVN. These forces numbered about 20,000 in December 1968, 13,000 in December 1969, 10,000 in December 1970, and 12,000 in December 1971. There were some 20,000 troops in the threat area in March 1972, but these all had deployed into northern South Vietnam by 3 April.

c. Including personnel in air defense units.

#### Current Combat Capabilities - Enemy and Friendly

15. Hanoi's willingness to move an increasing proportion of its troops outside North Vietnam has resulted in changes in the comparative enemy-versus-friendly main force strengths in South Vietnam. As can be seen by the following tabulation, GVN main forces enjoy a significantly greater superiority in MRs 3 and 4 than in MRs 1 and 2 -- even with the inclusion of all of COSVN's 5th, 7th, and 9th<sup>(4)</sup> Cambodia-based Divisions in the MR 3 ratio, and Cambodia's Phuco Long Front in MR 4's ratio.

As of	Main Force Ratios (Allied to VC/NVA) a/				
	MR 1	MR 2	MR 3	MR 4	Total
1 April 1968	2.4	3.3	3.9	2.4	2.9
1970	2.5	7.0	4.5	8.3	4.2
1972	1.9	2.1	3.3	4.6	2.8

a. The figures, based on CIA analysis, are a ratio of aggregate maneuver battalion strength. They include US forces for 1968 and 1970 only, and in 1972 they include the GVN's regional force battalions. The ratios also include for 1972 the 320th, 324B, 308, and 304th NVA Divisions. The ARVN side of the ratio for MRs 1 and 2 includes the planned deployment of the remaining Marines and Airborne units out of the reserves but does not include other recent ARVN redeployments which would alter the ratios somewhat. This effect, however, is offset to some degree by the enemy and friendly losses thus far in the campaign.

4. Including also the 271st and 24th Independent NVA Regiments.

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16. Between 1970 and 1972 the Main Force Ratio for all military regions shows a significant decrease as a result of US troop withdrawals and the substantial augmentation of enemy main forces this dry season. Furthermore, the initial impact of the enemy's current offensive in northern MR 1 emphasizes the importance of Allied tactical air support to GVN main forces in meeting major enemy actions. Very recent COMINT indicates that elements of the NVA 325th Division have now moved south from Hanoi to below Vinh. If this division continues to move south either in a reserve status in the DMZ area or into the northern MR 1 fighting, the force ratio for MR 1 will decline even further - closer to parity.

17. Another significant development impacting on the current fighting and that of the next three months is the introduction by North Vietnam of a very high level of firepower. To date, Hanoi has mobilized within northern MR 1 its heaviest concentration of NVA firepower of the war. For the first time, the NVA has within Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces at least five artillery regiments - compared with a previous high of only three. In addition, Hanoi has deployed into MR 1 elements of at least four air defense regiments and major elements of an armor regiment. In MR 2 the enemy also has introduced what appears to be the largest concentration of firepower in the B-3 Front area during the war - artillery plus air defense and armor units. This dry season the use of armor also appears to have extended down into MR 3 for the first time.

18. Not only has the enemy augmented the absolute number of guns but, equally important, he has introduced into South Vietnam new weapons with greater range and firepower. This includes 130-mm field guns, 152-mm howitzers, and possibly 160-mm mortars. He also seems to be in the process of deploying surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) to South Vietnam for the first time in the war. There are some indications the enemy may have intended to support the offensive in MR 1 with aircraft, but to date he has refrained from ground support operations and, in the face of the US air response, has limited his offensive air activity.

19. To date, the level of VC/NVA losses from the current fighting within South Vietnam is unclear. While they probably have been heavy in MR 1, considering the number of enemy forces committed, casualties apparently have not been relatively as high as in other periods of heavy fighting during the last three years. For one thing, poor weather conditions have restricted US/GVN tactical air operations - a major firepower advantage for the South Vietnamese. Second, the enemy's initial attacks in MR 1 were largely attacks by fire with only limited ground assaults, thereby minimizing casualties.

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Current Military Region Assessment (5)Military Region 1

20. A substantial portion of enemy main forces in MR 1 this dry season is concentrated in Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces and now is larger than any year during the war. To counter the present enemy major offensive in the two northern provinces, friendly forces are relying heavily on concentrated B-52 bombing support missions, tactical air, and main force reinforcement from MRs 3 and 4.

5. In the analysis of enemy strategies presented to the Senior Review Group (SRG) last April, it was indicated that if the enemy were intending to carry out a prolonged offensive in 1972, his force structure would be approximately as follows (based on the 1968 enemy deployment patterns):

<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>Cambodia</u>
55,000	33,000	27,000	20,000	45,000

At the present time, the enemy combat force (VC/NVA) is estimated to be deployed roughly as follows (in round numbers)\*:

<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>Cambodia</u>
50,000+	33,000+	19,000	17,000	35,000

The April SRG study indicated that for the enemy to maintain a prolonged offensive along 1968 lines, he would require an annual infiltration on the order of 250,000 to 300,000 (this total was based on an estimate of enemy losses throughout 1968). The level of infiltration thus far in the current dry season -- approximately 120,000 -- is, of course, far below that total. However, to this must be added the organic unit redeployments which have taken place outside the infiltration channels -- on the order of 30,000 combat troops to the war theater as a whole. Furthermore, in 1968 much of the infiltration took place after the heavy fighting had commenced, rather than before. Between April and August 1968, some 130,000 replacement troops were sent into South Vietnam via the infiltration routes. It is not possible to judge whether Hanoi is preparing such a massive infiltration activity at this time, but there are signs -- current recruitment and maintenance of the infiltration pipeline -- that at least some more infiltration is to come.

\* DIA estimates are as follows:

<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>Cambodia</u>
50,000+	35,000-	10,000-	12,000-	30,000-
		40,000	15,000	15,000
				35,000

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21. The main force shield around the coastal lowlands which depended on long-range and medium-range artillery (175-mm, 155-mm, and 105-mm), armor/infantry reaction forces, and Allied tactical air has been penetrated by enemy main forces. This was primarily due to a curtailment of Allied tactical air effectiveness owing to bad weather and the use of SAMs as well as to massive enemy firepower directed from covert positions during the initial stages of the offensive. The offensive may be approaching a new phase after an extended lull in combat activity. The weather was a decisive factor in the initial stages of offensive activity and probably will be again for the second phase of the offensive. COMINT indicates that elements of the 325th NVA Division have moved out of the Hanoi area to a point south of Vinh. If the entire division moves into southern Quang Binh Province or northern GVN MR 1, this will increase the enemy main force threat to friendly forces operating in the area and the main force ratio will approach parity.

22. Poised to meet the enemy's next move in northern MR 1 are GVN main force units from the 1st and 3rd ARVN Divisions, the Vietnamese Marine Corps Division, and a Ranger Division, with the 2nd ARVN Division deployed further south. The North Vietnamese ability to execute successful major assaults in northern MR 1 will depend on the will of GVN main forces to stand and fight together with sustained and effective Allied firepower. In any case, the North Vietnamese have the capability from the standpoint of manpower to sustain a major offensive in MR 1 for the next three months.

Military Region 2

23. Since January 1972 the enemy has dramatically increased his main force structure in MR 2, primarily within Pleiku and Kontum Provinces. The estimated current level of infiltration to the B-3 Front is approximately 42,000 men, with an additional 16,000 destined for VC MR 5 (which includes the coastal lowlands of MR 2 and southern MR 1). Infiltration to MR 2 is the highest recorded at any time during the war. Included in the infiltration total is the deployment of one full division, the 320th, in addition to filler and replacement personnel. Moreover, two regiments of the NVA 2nd Division have been deployed into Kontum Province from southern Laos. Rounding out the enemy manpower buildup has been the unprecedented flow of war materiel to the central highlands. Although 130-mm field guns have not been detected in the area, heavy mortars and medium-range artillery have been deployed to support enemy ground forces. In addition, it is believed that antiaircraft artillery has been provided to this area for the first time, representing a new threat to Allied tactical air and helicopter support operations. Finally, reports have suggested that the enemy plans to employ a significant armor force during offensive

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operations this dry season.<sup>(6)</sup> COMINT and forward air controller reports have indicated that NVA tanks were deploying in the direction of the central highlands from southern Laos.

24. Friendly main forces have assumed a defensive posture centered around key fire support bases forming a main force shield supported by B-52 bombing missions, Allied tactical air, medium-range artillery (155-mm and 105-mm), and armor/infantry reaction forces designed to protect the province capitals of Kontum and Pleiku Cities and key lines of communication. The firepower balance currently is in favor of friendly forces primarily as a result of Allied tactical air. However, as the wet season approaches in the central highlands around the end of April, friendly firepower assets will be reduced as bad weather affects the use of Allied tactical air. Moreover, elements of the NVA 3rd Division have moved to western Binh Dinh Province near Route 19 for purposes of interdicting ARVN convoys moving from Qui Nhon City to Pleiku City.

25. It seems certain that there will be heavy fighting within the next few weeks in the highlands, together with a resumption of the heavy fighting in MR 1, resulting in a great loss of life to both sides. Given the current friendly main force shield supported by effective Allied firepower and armor/infantry reaction forces, the GVN should be able to parry enemy main forces this dry season, but it will be faced with the strongest enemy total force structure in MR 2 since early 1968. The enemy's in-place manpower position should permit him to sustain heavy combat action for several months, barring decisive defeats at ARVN's hands in critical engagements or serious manpower losses inflicted by Allied airpower.

#### Military Region 3

26. Current evidence suggests that the enemy is shifting in MR 3 to main force warfare supported from Cambodia. The full manpower commitment on the enemy's part will depend on the extent to which he is able to reposition his main forces currently located in Cambodia. At least two VC/NVA infantry divisions have recently moved into MR 3. In addition, there are tenuous indications that the headquarters of COSVN's Artillery Command also has moved from Cambodia into MR 3, suggesting that some subordinate elements may soon follow.

27. The main weight of enemy attacks in MR 3 is undoubtedly yet to come. Enemy casualty rates, already apparently high at Loc Ninh, do not appear, however, to have reached a level which would curtail further activity in the next three-month period, although for the enemy to enlarge

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6. The dry season in the highlands of MR 2 usually begins in November and continues through April.

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the scope of his offensive to include major targets throughout MR 3, an increased manpower commitment would be required in that area.

Military Region 4

28. The VC/NVA's military posture is seriously eroded in MR 4 for several reasons, including the Communists' disastrous military losses during 1968, the subsequent movement of GVN forces into VC villages, and, more recently, improved ARVN aggressiveness. To offset this weakened military position, in late 1971 the communists began activating a division command echelon from under-strength units already within MR 4 and recently infiltrated at least one new NVA infantry regiment into the Delta. In addition, the Communists have recently shifted at least two infantry regiments of the Phuoc Long Front in Cambodia to the border of GVN Chau Doc Province.

29. Even with these forces, however, VC/NVA capabilities in MR 4 do not seem sufficient to pose a serious challenge to GVN military dominance on a large scale. Although there has been a recent upsurge in VC/NVA harassing actions in MR 4, enemy losses there have thus far been the lightest of all the military regions and can easily be sustained at this level for the next three months, even with some increase in enemy-initiated activity. It is unlikely that the enemy could sustain a major offensive in the area over this period unless substantial numbers of ARVN combat troops were dispatched to other military regions.

Logistics

30. The overall picture of enemy logistic activity during the past several months matches that of his military manpower commitment. In southern North Vietnam, stocks of ordnance, petroleum, and other war materiel are at very high levels. Unusually heavy levels of resupply have been detected in southern Laos and along the Cambodian and South Vietnamese frontiers – particularly in the northern regions. Heavy supply activity has also been detected across the DMZ since before the beginning of the enemy offensive in MR 1. Communist forces in South Vietnam are in a much more favorable logistics posture currently than at this same time a year ago.

Supply Movements This Dry Season

Southern Laos

31. The Communists' annual dry season "General Transportation Offensive" in southern Laos which got into high gear in early January has

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continued to the present.<sup>(7)</sup> Facilitated by a considerable road construction effort and restructured logistic apparatus, large quantities of supplies have been moved from North Vietnam through the Laotian Panhandle into Cambodia and South Vietnam. A new road system has been built through the central Laos Panhandle; more than 100 miles of new roads are being constructed in northeastern Cambodia; new roads have been built through the DMZ into South Vietnam; and a series of new roads is being built south of the tri-border area, presumably to support troop deployments in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam.

32. The level of logistic activity noted in the southernmost part of the Laos Panhandle has been impressive. For example, as the "General Transportation Offensive" began in January, Binh Tram 35 in the Ban Bac area reportedly delivered some 3,500 short tons (an average of 113 short tons per day - STPD) of supplies during the month - probably the largest monthly total ever detected moving that far south.<sup>(8)</sup> Besides these heavy southward deliveries, large quantities of supplies also have been detected moving eastward toward South Vietnam. Massive quantities of arms and ammunition have been included in the detected supply deliveries. For example, Binh Tram 45 shipped some 2,800 tons of ordnance to Binh Tram 46 along the new central road system during February. The shipments included virtually every category of weapon and ammunition known to be in the North Vietnamese inventory and represent the largest monthly shipment of munitions ever noted in COMINT in southern Laos. This high level of activity along the central corridor has continued through March. A summary report for the period 1-31 March indicated that around 5,000 tons of supplies had been shipped south by Binh Tram 45 near Muong Nong. The deliveries included at least 1,900 tons of rice, 1,000 tons of ordnance, and 1,100 tons of gasoline. The relatively large quantity of fuel is sufficient to sustain a major transport effort in extreme southern Laos and northern Cambodia into the wet season. In this connection, a 4 April intercept indicated that the North Vietnamese intend to continue this year's large-scale logistic campaign at least through April - the "highpoint" month of the "General Transportation Offensive." The term "highpoint" may indicate that the enemy plans to move more supplies during April than in any of the previous months of the offensive.

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7. The area has now entered the transitional weather phase preceding the rainy southwest monsoon season which starts usually in May. Thus far, however, weather has not yet affected the road system which remains in generally excellent condition.
8. Previous record levels of supply deliveries in the southern Panhandle were reached during February and March 1970 when Binh Tram 35 reported receiving an average of 107 STPD. Comparing the two, the 113 STPD figure for January 1972 represents Binh Tram 35's deliveries further south (not receipts from the north) well before the normal peak levels of activity in February-March.

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33. This heavy supply activity in the southern Panhandle has resulted in supply throughput to South Vietnam and Cambodia this season being considerably higher than that of last year at this time, and, second, has allowed the Communists to augment their stockpiles of supplies, particularly of arms and ammunition. The stockpiles close to combat zones take on a particular significance as the wet season approaches. Throughput of arms and ammunition will be able to continue at significant levels despite the reduction in vehicle activity in the Laotian Panhandle necessitated by heavy seasonal rains.

Throughput to Cambodia and the B-3 Front<sup>(9)</sup>

34. Available COMINT intercepts from the tri-border area have been sufficient to provide a rough estimate of supply throughput to Cambodia and the B-3 Front from October through March this dry season.<sup>(10)</sup> The resulting flow estimate for shipments to Cambodia ranged from 3,300 tons (18 STPD) to 5,200 tons (28 STPD). These deliveries comprised virtually all arms, ammunition, and equipment. The B-3 Front estimate is 3,100 tons (17 STPD) to 5,100 tons (28 STPD), comprising about one-third food and about 60% ordnance. The tabulation below summarizes the estimated throughput.

	<u>Short Tons</u>	
	<u>To Cambodia</u>	<u>To B-3 Front</u>
October	0	0
November	300	200
December	0-300 <u>a/</u>	0-200 <u>a/</u>
January	1,400	1,100
February	1,600	1,800
March	0-1,600 <u>a/</u>	0-1,800 <u>a/</u>
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,300-5,200</i>	<i>3,100-5,100</i>

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9. The relationship between these levels of resupply and the enemy's requirement for sustained offensive action is presented in the section entitled "The Current Enemy Logistics Situation in South Vietnam."

10. Because the number of days of shipping activity reflected in COMINT is relatively small, supply flows were calculated using a short tons per day (gross tonnages divided by number of days) factor. The composition was derived by averaging shipments to the B-3 Front which were identified by type. The estimate does not include rice moved east on Route 19 in northern Cambodia.

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Supply Movements into GVN MR 1

*Supply Flows from Laos*

35. Since the beginning of the dry season the enemy has moved substantial quantities of supplies from Laos into MR 1, probably on the order of 3,000 tons. The heaviest supply movement apparently has occurred along Route 9 where in mid-January -- only days after the enemy's "General Transportation Offensive" in southern Laos had begun -- sensors indicated a surge in activity. Subsequently, during the period 17 January - 29 February, sensors detected more than 200 trucks moving east along Route 9 into MR 1. Sensors continued to reflect a high level of activity during March, which COMINT and collateral information indicated was associated with supply flows and the movement of heavy artillery into MR 1. The Communists also have moved large quantities of supplies into MR 1 over Route 922. According to sensors, since the beginning of the dry season nearly 300 trucks have moved east over this route. The enemy also has made use of Routes 925 and 926, although only light to moderate levels of truck traffic have been detected on these roads during February and March.

*Supply Flows Through the DMZ*

36. The Communists have moved significant quantities of supplies along Routes 103 and 120 across the DMZ to new Route 6086/608<sup>(11)</sup> for shipments farther south and east in MR 1. In late January, COMINT revealed substantial deliveries of arms and ammunition to the lower Panhandle of North Vietnam. COMINT reflected Rear Service units at Vinh shipped large quantities of 130-mm artillery ammunition to the B-5 Front. By mid-February, more than 3,500 rounds of this ammunition and 2,500 rounds of 122-mm ammunition had been moved to the DMZ area. Similar large shipments of other types of ammunition probably were delivered to the vicinity of the DMZ but were not detected in COMINT. In late February, nearly 500 rounds of 130-mm ammunition were shipped south from Vinh with a final destination of South Vietnam.

37. From February through mid-March, sensors indicated that possibly as many as 100-200 trucks may have entered MR 1 on Routes 103/120 out of the DMZ. It was not until mid-March, however, that supplies could have been trucked directly across the DMZ and down Route 6086/608 to as far south as the Route 9 junction, the main west

11. A year ago, enemy access across the DMZ into MR 1 was limited to foot and pack trails. By late March, when the Communists began their offensive in MR 1, four new roads had been built through the DMZ; the Route 6086/608 extensions of Routes 103 and 120, an extension of Route 102, and an extension of Route 1006.

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to east road in MR 1.<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore, supplies shipped across the DMZ in February and early March probably were portered eastward to combat forces on the many foot and pack trails in the area. Since mid-March, sensors have indicated a continued flow of truck traffic – possibly another 100 trucks – moving south out of the DMZ on this road.

38. The North Vietnamese also have moved substantial amounts of materiel across the DMZ along existing Route 1, although the exact amount is unknown. Taking advantage of the poor flying weather over northern MR 1, the North Vietnamese began shipping large quantities of supplies in late March. On 1 April, rear service elements reported that transportation forces had begun moving down Route 1, and, by 3 April, 130 vehicles carrying cargo had moved south. Self-propelled artillery also was noted moving south across the Ben Hai River. Finally, some supplies may have entered MR 1 across the DMZ on two other new roads, Routes 102 and 1006. Photography of 29 March also revealed that Route 1006 was sustaining truck traffic. Total supply movement across the DMZ is conservatively estimated at 1,500-2,000 tons to the present time.

#### Current Enemy Logistics Situation in South Vietnam

##### Military Region 1

39. Because of their proximity to major supply arteries in Laos and the DMZ, Communist forces in northern South Vietnam operate from a close and relatively secure logistics base. They have received a substantial increase in supply flows this year compared with a year ago and, in conjunction with local procurement of supplies, are in a strong supply position. Reports of resupply problems<sup>(13)</sup> in MR 1 have been limited almost exclusively to the coastal regions, and even in these areas the Communists have made some improvements, especially in the Quang Da Special Zone (Quang Nam Province). They appear logically capable of supporting major sustained operations in MR 1 over the next three months and probably longer: the monsoon rains which affect other areas of South Vietnam would have less influence on Communist operations in the north. Supply problems in forward areas could affect the timing of some enemy actions.

40. To date this dry season the Communists have throughput on the order of 4,500-5,000 tons of supplies into MR 1 through Laos and across

12. Photography on 18 February showed that Route 6086/608 was motorable only to its junction with Route 925 or about 13 miles north of its junction with Route 9. Photography of 23 March indicated that the unfinished sections of Route 6086/608 had been completed and were carrying truck traffic to its junction with Route 9.

13. Since last summer, reports of enemy resupply problems throughout South Vietnam have fallen sharply. While this may be partly a function of reduced reporting, it almost certainly reflects an improved enemy logistic position.

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the DMZ. Most of this total has been delivered to western Quang Tri since January. Although the composition of these supplies is unknown, it is estimated that food constitutes about 60% of the supplies while the rest is weapons, equipment, and ammunition - 1,700-1,900 tons.<sup>(14)</sup> Communist resupply requirements in MR 1 during all of 1968, a year which included Tet and two other offensives, amounted to an average of 14 SPTD (consumption and ground losses). A similar expenditure rate, based on stocks existing at the present time, would permit the Communists to sustain a continued high level of combat for at least three months.<sup>(15)</sup> Throughput subsequent to April could be used to replenish stocks.

#### Military Region 2

41. Substantial supply deliveries have accompanied the unprecedented buildup of enemy troops in the B-3 Front area. COMINT has reflected heavy shipments of ordnance, particularly crew-served artillery and ammunition, into the area. There were complementary measures designed to improve the logistics posture of units in the B-3 Front taken late last year when the enemy shipped large volumes of foodstuffs from the coastal regions or MR 1 to help satisfy the increased requirements of the augmented troop strength. A VC cadre, captured on 15 March in Kontum Province, stated that since early February the North Vietnamese had been transporting food from B-3 Front rear areas to supply bases located near Kontum City and that some 1,500 tons of rice had been distributed to battlefield units.

42. Between October 1971 and March 1972 an estimated 3,100-5,100 tons of supplies were delivered to the B-3 Front out of southern Laos.<sup>(16)</sup> Weapons, ammunition, and equipment made up a little over half of this total (1,800-2,950 tons). Because of the recent substantial buildup of enemy forces and the concomitant upgrading of enemy arms, 1968 combat levels would probably considerably underestimate current enemy requirements for a major sustained engagement in the central highlands. Consequently, the current estimate for weapons, ammunition, and equipment that would be required to sustain offensive operations in this area is about 200 tons per month, somewhat higher than the estimated 1968 average. Detected shipments of ordnance to the B-3 Front are sufficient for sustained military operations for several months with reserves available for stockpiling and

14. Given recent enemy attempts to maximize local production/procurement of foodstuffs, this estimate probably is conservative.

15. DIA believes the current enemy expenditure rate to be considerably higher than this (20-40 SPTD). Thus, based on this expenditure rate and not allowing for resupply, the enemy would be capable of sustaining the offensive activity for one or two months.

16. Additional, possibly large, amounts of supplies have also moved to the B-3 Front via Route 19 in northeast Cambodia.

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for cushioning the impact of losses resulting from air strikes. There could, of course, be distribution problems, particularly in the forward areas. (17)

Southern South Vietnam

43. Between October 1971 and March 1972 the enemy probably delivered about 3,300-5,200 tons of weapons, ammunition, and equipment into Cambodia. As much as 2,200 tons of this amount went to meet requirements in Cambodia itself; the residual of 1,100 to 3,000 tons was available for satisfying requirements in GVN MRs 3 and 4. Minimum resupply requirements in MRs 3 and 4 during that time period amounted to about 700 tons. The remaining tonnage would be adequate to sustain major operations in MR 3, but insufficient to meet the required amount for both MRs 3 and 4. If the enemy has had some undetected success in sea infiltration, adequate supplies might be available for both military regions. The distribution and prepositioning of these stocks by a weakened logistics infrastructure within MRs 3 and 4, however, continues to be an impediment to major sustained military engagements.

*Military Region 3*

44. Following the Allied cross-border incursions in early summer of 1970, the Communists began to rebuild their rear support apparatus and to expand their cross-border supply links to MRs 3 and 4. Beginning about mid-1971, the VC/NVA logistic units had established new supply routes, and some supplies were moving again from storage areas in Kampot and Kompong Cham Provinces into new cache areas close to the Cambodia - South Vietnam border. Despite several spoiling operations by ARVN to disrupt these efforts [redacted] prisoner-of-war interrogations clearly show that since last summer this reoccupation and supply buildup in former sanctuary areas has steadily gained momentum.

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45. Within Cambodia, no serious threat to the Communist logistic system currently supporting operations in MR 3 is expected over the next several months. The Communists can be expected to maintain supply deliveries from supply depots in Kratie, Chup, and Dambe to bases straddling the MR 3 border. Following the ARVN withdrawal from Krek in February, the tempo of enemy logistic activity surged dramatically as evidenced by the large increase in detected nighttime movement of motor vehicles between inland depots and the border. At the same time, [redacted] an increasing number of enemy caches near the border. Recent

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17. DIA believes that approximately half as much tonnage has been delivered to the B-3 Front and Cambodia. As in MR 1, DIA estimates that intensified combat operations could be supported for one to two months. Further resupply would depend on the enemy's ability to move additional supplies from Laos.

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seizure of enemy caches in MR 3 has provided additional evidence of Communist success at stockpiling. Data are insufficient by which to quantify the enemy's logistical position in MR 3, but our judgment is that over the next three months the Communists will be capable of logically supporting major engagements in the border provinces and, if they choose, gradually increasing the scale and intensity of harassing operations in other areas of MR 3. Much could depend, however, on the success of Allied countermeasures and the influence of the approaching wet season on Communist abilities to preposition supplies in forward areas. Overall, while we credit the enemy with an improving logistic capability in MR 3, the evidence suggests that he could not sustain a prolonged main force offensive in that area.

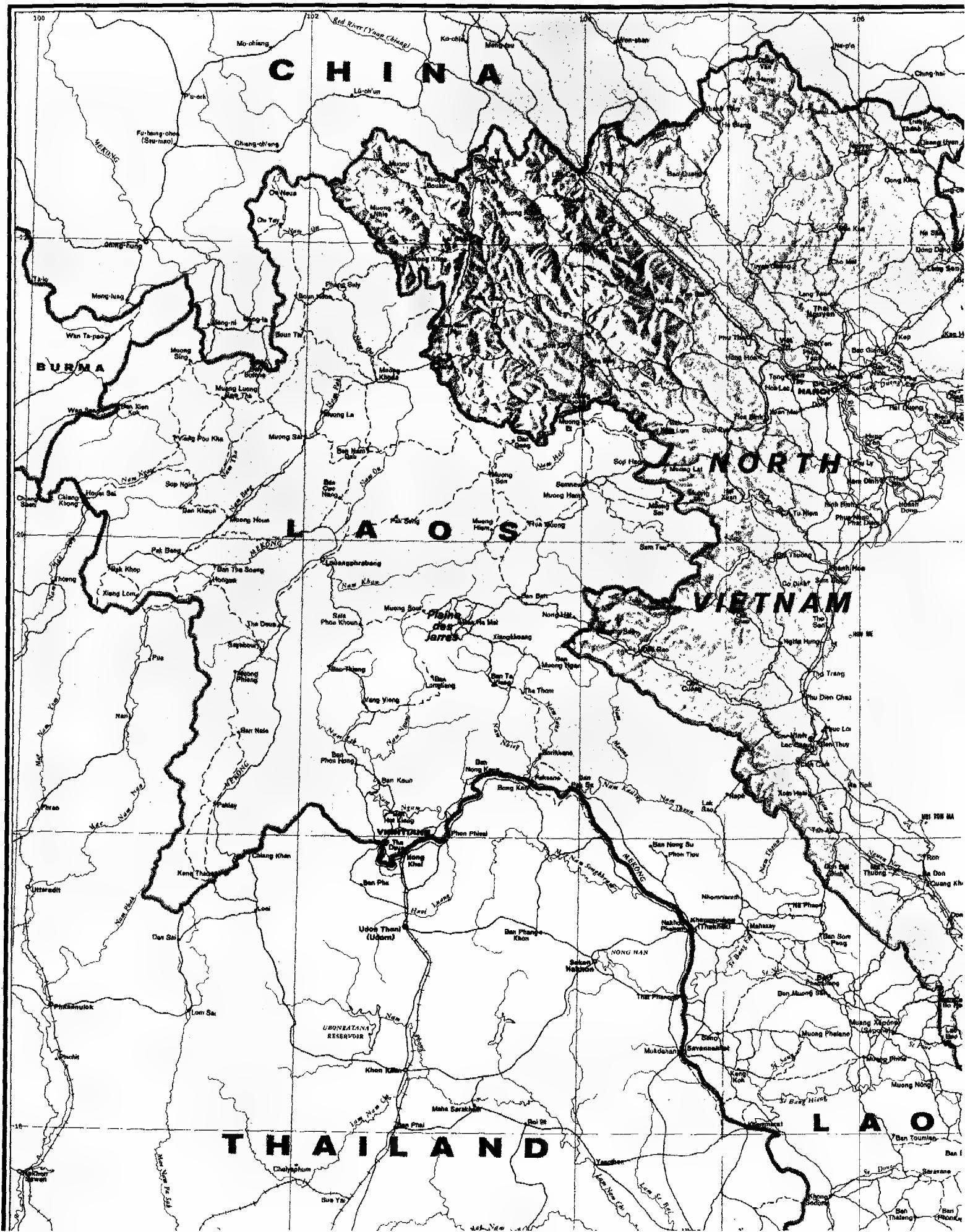
*Military Region 4*

46. Enemy sanctuaries opposite MR 4 were not as severely disturbed by the Allied incursions into Cambodia in 1970 as were those farther north. Large amounts of ordnance were hurriedly relocated by the Communists into Kampot Province (Cambodia) and parts of Kien Giang Province (South Vietnam) to escape capture. However, it was not until September 1971 that information appeared indicating that the Communists intended to reestablish supply channels from Cambodia into northern MR 4. By this time, small-scale shipments of weapons and ammunition began to move by sampan south along tributaries of the Mekong River. At about the same time, another supply route leading into northern MR 4 was found. This route was used to transport weapons and supplies originating from Chup into the Mekong Delta. Since mid-1971, according to several informed sources, resupply activity into southern MR 4 has been taking place using both overland and seaborne routes. Communist forces in MR 4 may also be meeting part of their resupply requirements from seaborne deliveries. Although it is unlikely that any of the 14 attempts by steel-hulled trawlers at supply infiltration this dry season were successful, recent reporting indicates that some small quantities of supplies are being moved from Cambodia into MR 4 via the Gulf of Siam. Reports of serious supply shortages, endemic before mid-1971, have tapered off since then.

47. The enemy's supply situation at present should enable the Communists to sustain several highpoints - such as are now occurring - and a commitment to the use of indirect fire attacks - mortar and rocket shellings. However, major main force operations like those currently under way in MR 1 and those expected in the B-3 Front seem unlikely.

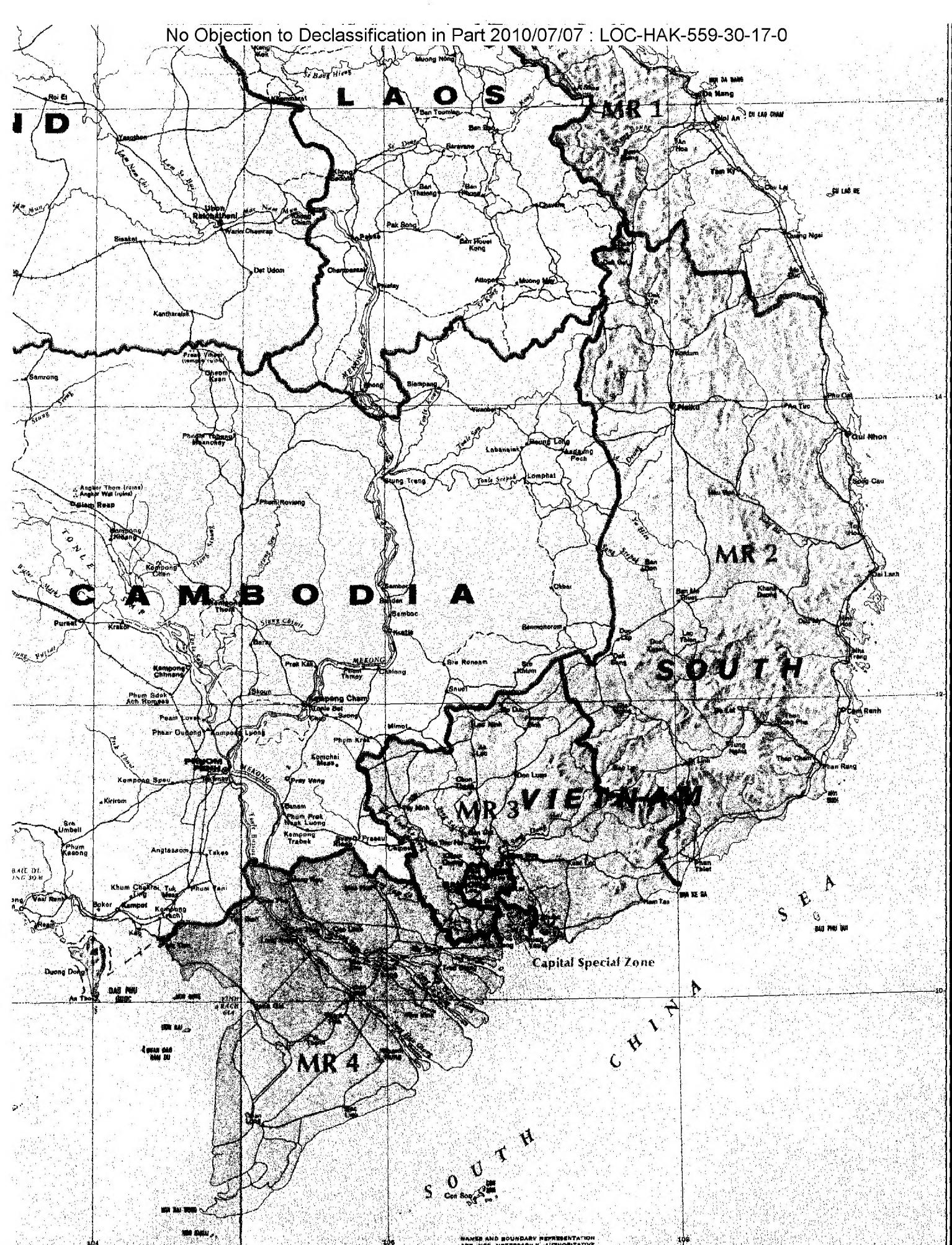
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